1-1-1965

Measure and the Mode: The Comedies of William Congreve

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(TITLE)

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PLAN B PAPER

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE MASTER OF SCIENCE IN EDUCATION
AND PREPARED IN COURSE

English 491

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY,
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

1965
YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THIS PLAN B PAPER BE ACCEPTED AS
FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE DEGREE, M.S. IN ED.

August 6, 1965
DATE

[redacted]
ADVISER

August 6, 1965
DATE

[redacted]
DEPARTMENT HEAD

CRITICAL INTERPRETATION

Critical interpretation of William Congreve's last play, The Way of the World, written in 1700, has varied widely. Critics have seen the play as a pure triumph of wit and language, but many have failed to see any value in the play beyond its sparkling language. Though some critics have seen value in the play for its brilliant characterizations, others have gazed at the play with unbelieving eyes and have seen it as an artificial world of cardboard characters, which fail to bring any reality to mind. Reality in the play, however, has been noted by some critics, some of whom have related the reality to the struggle for a legacy or a suitable marriage. A small number of critics have found sincerity and rationality in the play. As could be expected, several combinations of these views have occurred.

The purpose of the present study is to validate further the view that Mirabell and Millamant have sincere love and a sincere desire for a rational and stable marriage and to show that Mirabell and Millamant are the ideal representatives of the social system in which they live. The procedure will be an examination of the critical interpretation of Congreve's The Way of the World, the social conventions of the Restoration Period, and the

other comedies of Congreve in relation to The Way of the World.

THE CRITICS

The incredible, witty dialogue of Congreve has been noted by critics; it has been the only quality admired by some. Though William Hazlitt sees more than witty dialogue in Congreve, he is extremely impressed by the dialogue. He says;

> The style of Congreve is inimitable, nay perfect. It is the highest model of comic dialogue. Every sentence is replete with sense and satire, conveyed in the most polished and pointed terms. Every page presents a shower of brilliant conceits, is a tissue of epigrams in prose, is a new triumph of wit, a new conquest over dulness. The fire of artful raillery is nowhere else so well kept up.[1]

Allardyce Nicoll notes, "Congreve dwells almost wholly in the world of the intellect; his amours are not of passion, not of the heart, but of the head."[2]

Gerald E. Bentley sees little in The Way of the World other than polished dialogue. "This is a comedy of manners at its peak. The ideas and the emotional

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[1]Eric Bentley (ed.), William Congreve, Complete Plays (New York: Hill and Wang, Inc., 1956), p. 30.

[2]Allardyce Nicoll, British Drama (New York: Thomas A. Crowell Co., 1925), p. 247.

effects are negligible, the polish of the dialogue and the exquisite calculation of the pose of the mannered characters are the subjects of Congreve's primary concern."[1]

Brice Harris agrees with Bentley in saying, "The story is of small moment. The importance lies in the brilliance, the sparkle of the dialogue. . . ."[2]

George Meredith expresses admiration for Congreve's characterization as well as for his dialogue:

> Congreve's The Way of the World is an exception to our other comedies, his own among them, by virtue of the remarkable brilliancy of the writing, and the figure of Millamant. Millamant is a perfect portrait of a coquette, both in her resistance to Mirabell and the manner of her surrender, and also in her tongue.[3]

> Millamant is an admirable, almost a lovable, heroine. It is a piece of genius in a writer to make a woman's manner of speech portray her. You feel sensible of her presence in every line of her speaking. What she utters adds to her personal witchery, and is not further memorable. She is a flashing portrait, and a type of the superior ladies who do not think, not of those who do.[4]

Samuel Johnson thinks little of Congreve's characters; he says, "His characters are commonly fictitious and artificial, with very little of nature, and not much of life."[5]

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[1]Gerald Eades Bentley, The Development of English Drama (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1950), p. 512.

[2]Brice Harris (ed.), Restoration Plays (New York: Random House, 1953), p. xvi.

[3]George Meredith and Henri Bergson, "An Essay on Comedy," "Laughter," Comedy (New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1956), p. 18.

[4]Ibid., p. 20.

[5]Samuel Johnson, Lives of the English Poets (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1925), p. 8.

Charles Lamb makes what is probably the most memorable comment on the artificial characters sometimes seen in Congreve's comedies. He notes:

> I do not know how it is with others, but I feel better always for the perusal of one of Congreve's comedies. I am the gayer at least for it; and I could never connect those sports of a witty fancy in any shape with any result to be drawn from them to imitation in real life. They are a world of themselves almost as much as fairy-land. . . .It is altogether a speculative scene of things, which has no reference whatever to the world that is.[1]

On the other hand, many critics, especially later than Lamb, have noted that the characters in the plays are not unlike members of the court society of the Restoration Period. Joseph Wood Krutch, for example, says, "The atmosphere of the plays corresponded very closely with the atmosphere of a portion of the society. . . .no character or incident in the plays was unwarranted by life. . . ."[2]

Alan S. Downer agrees with Krutch in saying, "In both tone and incident it [the drama of the period] is a realistic portrait of a transitional society."[3]

Victorian historian Thomas B. Macaulay sees Mirabell mainly as a dowry hunter.[4] Paul and Miriam Mueschke

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[1]Eric Bentley, p. 32.

[2]Joseph Wood Krutch, Comedy and Conscience after the Restoration (New York: Columbia University Press, 1924), p. 24.

[3]Alan S. Downer, The British Drama (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1950), p. 201.

[4]Vincent Hopper and Gerald B. Lahey (eds.), The Way of the World (New York: Barron's Educational Press, 1958), p. 27.

view the quest for a legacy of primary importance, though they do appreciate the rationality of the proviso scene.[1]

Downer notes the rationality of the proviso scene:

> The play has exemplified, in Fainall and his wife, the behavior of a typical married couple in a relationship which is both undignified and unhappy. The proviso scene thus becomes more than a mere comic convention as point by point the lovers provide a reasonable basis for their marriage.[2]

Downer, however, sees marriage as being of primary importance and says:

> The norms of conduct are not secondary but central figures in the plot, and the girds at marriage are directly related to the theme. Every incident, farcical, satirical, or simply humorous, has bearing on the main design, to establish a rational marriage contract.[3]

The above selections are representative of the criticism which asserts that the two protagonists seem to be dilettantes, opportunists, rakes, without particularly wholesome aspirations. For the most part critics have generally slighted examining the evidence of the love of Mirabell and Millamant and have not shown the growth in Congreve's comedies toward the perfection of two characters who are ideal representatives of the courtly life of the Restoration Period.

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[1]Paul and Miriam Mueschke, A New View of Congreve's Way of the World (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1958), p. 28.

[2]Downer, p. 214.

[3]Ibid., p. 215.

THE MODE AND THE PLAYS

The courtly manner of life of the Restoration Period (1660-1700) was a reaction to the austere rule of the Puritans. In the first years after the restoration of Charles II, there was great license in the courtly life. Krutch says:

> . . .during the early part of the period there was much that was savage both in public and private life.[1]
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> . . . . . .
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> The courtiers of Charles determined to carry pleasure and gallantry even to divine service.[2]
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> . . . . . .
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> To be vile in language was fashionable.[3]

The license of the courtly life was reflected in the drama of the Period. Krutch says: "The ordinary principles of decency were no more essential to the fine gentlemen in real life than they were on the stage."[4] Puritanism still existed in some segments of society just as did license, but after the first extreme reaction to Puritanism the pleasures of the court became somewhat more refined as they were tempered by time. As George Sherburn points out, ". . .Charles and his court had

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[1] Krutch, p. 34.

[2] Ibid., p. 25.

[3] Ibid., p. 32.

[4] Ibid., p. 32.

brought back from their Continental exile a love of French wit, gallantry, elegance, and artistic deftness. . . ."[1] Wit, artistic inclination, and intellectual refinement gained stature as desired social traits. Nicoll says:

> In the Whitehall which was ruled over by Charles II, intellectual refinement, epigrammatic wit, and easy dalliance had been made the prime qualities sought after by the gallants and their mistresses.[2]

From uninhibited social conditions in Restoration England the courtly life developed. To foster and preserve refined wit, manners, and dress required a social code or mode. Courtiers accordingly soon found that the degree of success of an individual in the court society was relative to the degree of his refinement in wit, manners, and dress. Any lack of refinement would diminish his worth in court society.

The code of manners also made demands on the relationships of the sexes. Sincere love in the social mode was a valued goal, but it was seldom reached. Bonamy Dobrée says:

> They [people living in the Restoration Period] found that, for them at least, affection and sexual desire were quite separate, and they tried to organize society on that basis. Love, in which the two feelings are imaginatively fused, scarcely existed for them.[3]

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[1]George Sherburn, A Literary History of England (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1948), III, pp. 699-700.

[2]Allardyce Nicoll, British Drama (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1962), p. 284.

[3]Bonamy Dobrée, Restoration Comedy 1660-1700 (London: Oxford University Press, 1924), p. 18.

Probably the scarcity of love in that society is the reason that little sincere love is seen in the drama of the Restoration Period. In Congreve's comedies, however, except his first, The Old Bachelor (1693), sincere love generally plays an important role because we see the protagonists' selflessness or complete concern for the lover. In his comedies deviations from sincere love (inconstancy, gallantry, selfishness) though perhaps tolerated in the social system are not shown to be worthwhile.

Congreve also deals with wit and manners. He is concerned with displaying a number of characters and showing their worth in the mode, their worth being determined by the degree of their refinement in wit and manners as well as the degree of sincerity in their love. True wit is shown as a desirable social trait, and, as Hopper and Lahey point out,[1] an excess of wit is buffoonery; a deficiency is boorishness. Refined manners are shown by Congreve to be desirable; a lack of manners is shown to result in hurt feelings and loss of poise, and affected manners are seen as disgusting.

In looking at the comedies of Congreve the development of characters which climaxes in the characters of Mirabell and Millamant (The Way of the World) as the ideal embodiments of the mode can be seen. They are the ideal representatives of the mode because

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[1]Hopper and Lahey, p. 34.

they have sincere love, true wit, and refined manners. In Congreve's other comedies even the best of the characters fail to represent ideal persons in the social mode. Examination of the other comedies brings the faults of the characters to light.

The lack of sincere love in The Old Bachelor is evident in the speeches of the characters. Vainlove says, "Faith, I hate love when 'tis forced on a man. . . ."[1] (I,i, p. 45)

Belinda comments, ". . .love is the devil, and sure to be in love is to be possessed." (II,ii, p. 58)

Vainlove says that love is a deity and that women are temples of love. (II,ii, p. 61-62)

Heartwell likens love to infection (III,ii, p.65) and says that in the old days "... .people married where they loved, but that fashion is changed. . . ." (III,iv, p. 74)

Belinda protests that ". . .you fluttering men of mode have made marriage a mere French dish" (V,iv, p. 103) and in the next scene laughs, "Ha! Ha! Ha! O gad, men grow such clowns when they are married!" (V,v, p. 105)

These comments about love are made by the main characters of the play. Because they do not have sincere love, they cannot be considered ideal representatives of the mode. Congreve shows that their insincere loves

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[1]Eric Bentley (ed.), William Congreve, Complete Plays (New York: Hill and Wang, Inc., 1956) [page references in the plays refer to this text hereafter].

give them little pleasure and, in some cases (especially in Heartwell's case), a considerable amount of pain. Love similar to the insincere love of these characters can also be seen in Congreve's other comedies, but the main characters display a more sincere, more satisfying love.

Characters such as Sharper, Sir Joseph Wittol, Captain Bluffe, and Silvia, are affected individuals with unrefined manners and not a sufficient amount of intelligence to display true wit. The main characters are superior to the secondary characters in manners and wit but do not approach the level of Mirabell and Millamant.

A similar situation exists in The Double-Dealer (1694) in that the most refined wit and manners are found in the main characters, but the element of sincere love has been added. False, insincere, unrewarding love becomes a characteristic of the affected individuals, Lady Touchwood, Lady Plyant, Lady Froth, and Brisk and of the villain, Maskwell. Lady Touchwood (a forerunner to Lady Wishfort) is in love with her husband's nephew, Mellefont, who does not return her love. Just as Lady Wishfort wishes revenge on Mirabell in The Way of the World, Lady Touchwood plans revenge on Mellefont.

Lady Plyant, because of her unrequited love for Mellefont and also because she refuses to have sexual relations with her husband, finds it necessary to

indulge in her affairs vicariously. Ironically, her imagined affair with Mellefont becomes real to her in her mind. Later she imaginatively "gives up" Mellefont in the hope of trapping Mellefont's friend, Careless.

Lady Froth and Brisk, two equally affected individuals, calmly carry on their affair under the solemn eyes of Lord Froth.

Views about honor, marriage, and love are expressed by the villainous Maskwell. In answer to Lady Touchwood's accusation that he has dishonored her he answers, "No, that I deny; for I never told in all my life. . . ." (I,iii, p. 128) Later he says about her, ". . .I have as little stomach to her now as if I were her husband." (III,i, p. 146)

Mellefont and Cynthia, who are the forerunners to Mirabell and Millamant, have a sincere love that gives them a degree of success and happiness in the mode which the others cannot achieve. Their conversation is similar to that of Mirabell and Millamant, though less involved with witty comparisons. Cynthia is as confident (perhaps more confident) of her power over the affections of Mellefont as is Millamant confident of her powers over Mirabell. Cynthia tries to play the part of the girl who could not care less but betrays herself by bringing up the subject of marriage too often.

The love of Cynthia and Mellefont grows as the play progresses. In their first scene Cynthia tells Mellefont that love is an "odd game" (contest) and that one person must be a loser. Mellefont replies that it is not a game but is "only a friendly trial of skill." (II,i, p. 135)

In their second scene, marriage, instead of a game to be played, becomes game to be hunted (the sport is now hunting, not marriage).(IV,i, p. 157) In the same scene Mellefont proposes that he and Cynthia elope.

> Mel. I don't know why we should not steal out of the house this very moment, and marry one another, without consideration, or the fear of repentance. Pox o' fortune, portion, settlements, and jointures!
> Cyn. Ay, Ay, what have we to do with 'em?--you know we marry for love.
> Mel. Love, love, downright, very villainous love.
> Cyn. And he that can't live upon love deserves to die in a ditch. Here, then, I give you my promise, in spite of duty, any temptation of wealth, your inconstancy, or my own inclination to change--
> Mel. To run most wilfully and unreasonably away with me this moment, and be married.
> Cyn. Hold!--never to marry anybody else.
> Mel. That's but a kind of negative consent.--Why, you won't balk the frolic?
> Cyn. If you had not been so assured of your own conduct I would not;--but 'tis but reasonable that since I consent to like a man without the vile consideration of money, he should give me a very evident demonstration of his wit: therefore let me see you undermine my Lady Touchwood, as you boasted, and force her to give her consent, and then--
> Mel. I'll do 't.
> Cyn. And I'll do 't. (IV,i, p. 158)

Such a course of action is not even faintly considered in The Way of the World. Though Mirabell and Millamant might agree that money is a "vile consideration," it is to them a very important consideration. The willingness of Mellefont and Cynthia to marry in spite of everything is seen again in their third encounter. Maskwell has proposed that they elope and Mellefont says, "I know no other way but this he has proposed; if you have love enough to run the venture." Cynthia replies:

> I don't know whether I have love enough--but I find I have obstinacy enough to pursue whatever I have once resolved; and a true female courage to oppose anything that resists my will, though 'twere reason itself. (V,iii, p. 180)

Though Cynthia perhaps does have doubts about the extent of her love for Mellefont, she must care more for him than she does for the comforts of wealth, because she is ready to leave her comforts for him.

A love similar to that of Mellefont and Cynthia is seen in Congreve's third comedy, Love for Love(1695), in the characters, Valentine and Angelica. Just as in The Double-Dealer triumphant, rewarding love is a characteristic of the main characters, insincere love is a characteristic of the affected, false-witted characters. The true love of Valentine and Angelica and the happiness that they find is contrasted with the false affairs of Mrs. Frail and Tattle, which have harmful effects on the innocent Ben and Miss Prue. Speeches of Mrs. Frail and

Tattle are indications of the level of their seriousness. Mrs. Frail says: "There is no creature perfectly civil but a husband. For in a little time he grows rude only to his wife, and that is the highest good breeding, for it begets his civility to other people." (I,ii, p. 212)

Tattle instructs Miss Prue, an awkward country girl, in the art of love: ". . .all well-bred persons lie--Besides, you are a woman, you must never speak what you think: your words must contradict your thoughts; but your actions may contradict your words." (II,i, pp. 229-230)

In contrast to the capriciousness of Mrs. Frail and Tattle is the earnestness of Valentine and Angelica. Valentine's only goal throughout the play is to gain the love of Angelica. Her only goal is to see positive proof of Valentine's love and then have him as a husband. These goals are reached in the last scene of the play.

Displeased with his son's expensive way of living, Sir Sampson Legend has been trying to get him to resign his right of inheritance to his brother, Ben; Valentine, if he will agree, will be given enough money to pay his debts, plus a small amount of money for his temporary needs. Angelica, in order to test Valentine's love, has told him that she is going to marry his father, Sir Sampson. When Angelica tells Valentine this, Sir Sampson again asks Valentine to resign his inheritance; Valentine answers:

> I have been disappointed of my only hope; and he that loses hope may part with anything. I never valued fortune, but as it was subservient to my pleasure; and my only pleasure was to please this lady; I have made many vain attempts, and find at last that nothing but my ruin can effect it; --Give me the paper. (V,ii, p. 283)

When Angelica hears this she answers:

> Had I the world to give you, it could not make me worthy of so generous and faithful a passion; here's my hand, my heart was always yours, and struggled very hard to make this utmost trial of your virtue. (V,ii, p. 283)

These exclamations of devotion are the most ardent in Congreve; that such displays of emotion will continue is evident.

> Ang. I have done dissembling now, Valentine; and if that coldness which I have always worn before you, should turn to an extreme fondness, you must not suspect it.
> Val. I'll prevent that suspicion:--for I intend to dote to that immoderate degree, that your fondness shall never distinguish itself enough to be taken notice of. If ever you seem to love too much, it must be only when I can't love enough. (V,ii, p. 284)

Because Valentine and Angelica do display extreme emotion, the last step in creating two characters who are the ideal representatives of the social mode is to create two characters who have sincere love but who are refined in their manners to the degree that they do not wish tc display their emotions publicly. Congreve takes that last step in creating Mirabell and Millamant.

In viewing Mirabell and Millamant as the ideal representatives of the mode, a comment from Louis Cazamian can be enlightening; he says, "One feels that

elegant raillery has now been bred in; that a new generation has risen which has this inborn gift. . . ."[1] By extending this comment to include other qualities that seem to have been inborn, it is easier to see the reasons that Mirabell and Millamant are such ideal representatives of the mode. Although The Way of the World was written in 1700, we see the two characters as having grown up in the latter part of the Restoration Period, having become familiar from childhood with, notably, the desired manners and wit requisite in their society. They become wise in the way of the world, taking their lessons from the successes and failures of the courtly world. The most frequently observed failures were those people who lacked true wit, refined manners, and sincere love, especially in marriage. Observation of the reasons for failure combined with their maturing reflections enabled them to see the hazards of courtly life and to avoid them.

The successes of Mirabell and Millamant are contrasted with the failures of the other characters. The most success in wit is generally attributed to Millamant. Hopper and Lahey state, "Actually, Millamant. . . is the most perfect embodiment of good understanding and wit; Fainall and Mirabell have good understanding, but slightly more sober, less nimble wit. . . ."[2] Just as in the other

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[1]Louis Cazamian and Emile Legouis, A History of English Literature (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1927), p. 703.

[2]Hopper and Lahey, p. 40.

plays, the best wit to be found is in the main characters. The wit of Witwoud is the lowest to be found and is seen to have an irritating effect on Millamant as she orders him to stop making "those dreadful similes." The pseudo-sophisticated wit and manners of Witwoud and Petulant are shown to have a harmful effect when they insultingly rail at Witwoud's half brother, Sir Wilfull Witwoud, on his arrival in town from the country. Sir Wilfull Witwoud asks why he is receiving such ill treatment and is told by Witwoud, ". . .'tis not modish to know relations in town. . . ." (III,iii, p. 336) Lady Wishfort comforts him, "When you have been abroad, nephew, you'll understand raillery better." (III,iii, p. 338)

Lady Wishfort serves as a model of the most affected type of individual, the model whom Millamant does not want to follow. Lady Wishfort's preparations for Sir Rowland and the scene itself show her to be a person concerned only with appearances; her deepest emotions are anger and revenge (the scene is also a striking contrast to Millamant's proviso scene with Mirabell, IV,ii). Lady Wishfort's affectations and lack of control are shown to be disgusting as Waitwell (Sir Rowland) says, "Oh, she is the very antidote to desire!" (IV, ii, p. 354) The disgust of Waitwell is even more significant when it is considered that he is a servant showing disgust for a member of the society which he serves.

Just as the secondary characters do not have the refinement of wit and manners that Mirabell and Millamant possess, they do not have the sincere love that the two lovers possess and do not gain the rewards of love. If the rewards of love come to anyone in The Way of the World, they come to Mirabell and Millamant; the Fainalls, Lady Wishfort, and Mrs. Marwood have only the results of their false affairs--doubt, distrust, and disappointment. Witwoud, Petulant, and Sir Wilfull Witwoud hardly make a serious attempt at love.

The views of love that the secondary characters have are like those that their counterparts in the other plays express. In the opening scene Fainall and Mirabell are playing cards; noticing that Mirabell is not concentrating, Fainall says, "I'd no more play with a man that slights his ill fortune, than I'd make love to a woman who undervalued the loss of her reputation." (I,i, p. 297)

To Fainall, who married for money, marriage is like a prison. Mrs. Fainall had married him in the fear that she and Mirabell might have a child. Fainall decides to permit his wife to make advances to Mirabell so that he can see Mrs. Marwood without fear of detection; he also accuses Mrs. Marwood of infidelity. Mrs. Marwood tells Mrs. Fainall that if she were married she would make her husband live "upon the rack of fear and jealousy."

The level of Lady Wishfort's thinking is revealed by Mirabell when he tells Fainall in the first scene of the play that Lady Wishfort was complimented to hear that the town thought she might be having an illegitimate child, when actually she was sick with dropsy.

The genuine love of Mirabell and Millamant is often not seen by the reader because there is little overt display of emotion. Though Dobrée mentions that Mirabell and Millamant "desire to love wholeheartedly,"[1] for the most part he and other critics have generally slighted examining any part of the play except the proviso scene for evidence of their love. But evidence can be seen in three speeches. In the first Mirabell tells Fainall that he likes Millamant for her faults.

> Fain. For a passionate lover, methinks you are a man somewhat too discerning in the failings of your mistress.
> Mir. And for a discerning man, somewhat too passionate a lover; for I like her with all her faults; nay, like her for her faults. Her follies are so natural, or so artful, that they become her; and those affectations which in another woman would be odious, serve but to make her more agreeable. (I,ii, p. 301)

This certainly sounds like a man in love, and that Mirabell has apparently found other women less agreeable than Millamant is evident. Since the end of an affair with Mrs. Fainall before her marriage, Mirabell has refused the affections of Mrs. Marwood and Lady Wishfort, concentrating only on Millamant.

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[1]Dobrée, p. 144.

Immediately following the proviso scene Millamant makes a direct statement of her love.

> Well, if Mirabell should not make a good husband, I am a lost thing,--for I find I love him violently. (IV,i, p. 348)

In the last scene of the play Mirabell reassures Millamant of his love after Lady Wishfort gives them her blessing.

> Lady Wish. Well, sir, take her, and with her all the joy I can give you.
> Mil. Why does not the man take me? would you have me give myself to you over again?
> Mir. Ay, and over and over again; [Kisses her hand.] I would have you as often as possibly I can. Well, Heaven grant I love you not too well, that's all my fear. (V,ii, p. 370)

In Mirabell's last sentence there is a double purpose. The remark is meant to be humorous, but it also reflects his desire for control of his emotions. Earlier, in the proviso scene Millamant demands that their manners be refined to that degree that they will not be "familiar or fond" in public.

> Mil. I won't be called names after I'm married; positively I won't be called names.
> Mir. Names!
> Mil. Ay, as wife, spouse, my dear, joy jewel, love, sweetheart, and the rest of that nauseous cant, in which men and their wives are so fulsomely familiar--I shall never bear that--good Mirabell, don't let us be familiar or fond, nor kiss before folks, like my Lady Fadler and Sir Francis: nor go to Hyde-park together the first Sunday in a new chariot to provoke eyes and whispers, and then never to be seen there together again; as if we were proud of one another the first week, and ashamed of one another ever after. (IV,i, p. 345)

Mirabell, appreciating her desire for restraining one's emotions in public, accepts her demands including the demands for personal privacy which she makes in her next speech.

The conditions that Mirabell offers are those which will insure Millamant's continued respectability and attractiveness. He requires that her acquaintance be "general," her dress and use of cosmetics be moderate, and her tea-table refreshments be non-alcoholic. In effect each recognizes the value of the other's provisos and allows them. The demands which the two lovers make are those which will enhance the possibility of a stable, happy marriage. The provisos also will insure retention of the high position that they hold in court society.

Just as Mirabell's speech ("Well, Heaven grant I love you not too well, that's all my fear.") has a double purpose; so does the proviso scene. The scene is meant to show concern for human values rather than for earthly values, such as of property and inheritance, in the writing of the marriage contract. The scene is also meant to be humorous, because the refined natures of the two lovers negate the need for provisos which deal for the most part with manners and habits.

The lovers apparently will need to remember the behavior suitable to their position from time to time, however. In the last scene Millamant almost loses control

as she shows doubt in asking, "Why does not the man take me?", and apparently displays too much affection after Mirabell's reassuring answer, as Sir Wilfull Witwoud is obliged to call for a dance so that ". . .we who are not lovers may have some other employment besides looking on." (V,iii, p. 371)

By way of conclusion, we can see in Mirabell and Millamant a synthesis of the qualities which make them the ideal representatives of the mode. They stand higher than any other of Congreve's characters, because we see in them fulfillment of the highest modes of taste, conduct, wit and decorum. Because of their surviving the great variety of test of moral probity, perhaps more numerous in this play than in the others of Congreve, Mirabell and Millamant are seen as ideal, not in word as much as in deed, in regard to love. Also the attitudes between the two protagonists are expressions of the stable, orthodox, or conservative views of marriage still acknowledged in the Restoration Period, however frequently unobserved.

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